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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: INTER-MINISTERIAL RIVALRIES SEEN AS SOURCE OF ONGOING DIFFICULTIES IN U.S.-UZBEK RELATIONS

REF: TASHKENT 1247

Classified By: Ambassador Richard B. Norland, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Reftel pointed to puzzling instances of rejection by Uzbek authorities of certain U.S. programs in such areas as rule of law, health and education -- puzzling because the proposed programs on the face of it do not appear threatening and because the general tenor of U.S.-Uzbek relations has improved significantly over the past year. Former First Deputy Foreign Minister (and former Uzbek Ambassador to the U.S.) Shavkat Khamrakulov offered some insights on this phenomenon to Ambassador in a conversation on October 28 (protect). His view tends to support the theory that certain elements within the GOU simply do not want relations with the U.S. to improve.

¶2. (C) Khamrakulov told the Ambassador that in his experience as a Deputy Foreign Minister (from June 1995 to March 1998) and then First Deputy Foreign Minister (from March 1998 until July 1998) -- and he is convinced such practices continue to this day -- there were several occasions when other ministries deliberately attempted to sabotage efforts to increase U.S.-Uzbek engagement. The most obvious examples had to do with human rights. Khamrakulov suggested that incidents such as the recent detention and prosecution of journalist Salidjahon Abdulrakhmanov in Karakalpakstan were knowingly contrived, with the aim of provoking the U.S. into a negative response which would in turn prompt President Karimov to tilt away from the U.S.

¶3. (C) Khamrakulov recalled that on the eve of President Karimov's first visit to the U.S., in the summer of 1996, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) threatened to arrest a prominent human rights defender. Frantic efforts by then-Foreign Minister (and now Uzbekistan's Ambassador to Washington) Abdulaziz Kamilov were required to halt the MVD from carrying out its threat during the visit, and no sooner had Karimov's plane left the U.S. to return to Uzbekistan than MVD went ahead and arrested the activist. Khamrakulov believes part of the motivation behind these efforts is to retain Russian influence in Uzbekistan -- in the zero-sum

mentality prevalent in this region, any gain by the U.S. is seen as a loss for Russia. Some Uzbek officials do not want to see that happen, while others see a chance to throw a wrench in the spokes of any U.S.-Uzbek initiative as a way to simply advance whatever program they happen to be engaged in.

¶4. (C) Khamrakulov observed that rejection of seemingly harmless programs, such as cultural exchanges, health care reform and educational development, in certain cases almost certainly stemmed from such self-interested motivations. He speculated that President Karimov may not even be aware of the games being played by some of his ministers in this respect.

NORLAND